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School Committee Minutes 04-29-2003

THE ARLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2003
5:30 – 7:00 PM
Arlington Town Hall
Selectmen's Hearing Room – Second Floor
Final Agenda

Present: Suzanne Owayda, Chair
Paul Schlichtman, Vice Chair
Joani LaMachia, Secretary
Barbara Goodman
Sue Sheffler
Jeff Thielman
Martin Thrope

Superintendent: Kathleen Donovan
Asst. Supt.: Joanne Gurry
Chief Financial Officer: David Kale
Budget Analyst: Janet Collins

Call to order: 5:35 pm

Public Participation

Trish Orlovsky read a letter to the School Committee voicing concern on the proposed cuts in programs and personnel and how they will affect special education students throughout the system. Ms. Orlovsky also invited members to attend the next Special Education Pac meeting on May 15th, 7-9Pm at the Brackett School.

Budget

Supt. Donovan reported that three budgets were presented to the Finance Committee on April 16th; a level service budget, a budget with \$5.1 million in reductions/services and a budget with \$2.1 million in reductions. Mrs. Donovan explained that in order to prepare for the public hearing on the school budget the School Committee must vote a budget. The Superintendent recommend voting two budgets, one figure if the override passes and one figure if the override does not pass.

On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Ms. Goodman it was Voted to adopt a preliminary budget; one budget in the amount of \$31,840,980.00 if the override passes and one budget in the amount of \$29,840,980.00 if the override does not pass, for the purposes of presenting a budget for the public hearing. 6-1 motion carries (Mr. Thrope abstain).

Ms. Goodman supported the motion but she believed that the fee schedule and athletics was not fully addressed and would like to reopen discussion on those items. Ms. LaMachia agreed and suggested that at the meeting of May 12th with principals a process on how to prioritize the list of cuts, add backs etc. be discussed. Mr. Schlichtman recommended that the budget subcommittee meet following the meeting with the principals on May 12th.

Mr. Thrope presented a list of seven proposed budget amendments for the Committee's consideration. Chairperson Owayda informed Mr. Thrope that tonight was not the time to discuss those recommendations as the Committee needed to vote only a bottom line figure for the public hearing.

Mr. Thrope stated that he would like to read the concluding part common to each of the amendment motions, at that point he was called out of order by the Chair. Ms. Owayda informed Mr. Thrope that his amendments would be addressed at the next budget subcommittee along with the requests of other Committee members.

Subcommittee Report – Curriculum & Instruction

Mr. Schlichtman reported that at its meeting on April 28th the subcommittee discussed the elimination of the advanced level in English and Social Studies as well as adding a philosophy statement on prerequisites. The subcommittee voted a title change in courses in the program of studies that would rename the basic and college prep levels to “collegiate 1 and collegiate 2” respectively. The subcommittee did not make a motion with regards to the advanced level and agreed that it (the retention or the elimination) required the discussion of the full committee.

On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Ms. Goodman it was unanimously Voted to change the name of the levels in the AHS Program of Studies from “basic” to “Collegiate 1” and from “college prep” to “Collegiate 2”.

The subcommittee also discussed and voted to replace required prerequisites with suggested prerequisites in the program of studies. Mr. Schlichtman explained that the use of suggested prerequisites versus required prerequisites would remove barriers for those students wishing higher expectations and increased academic rigor. Concerns were voiced surrounding how the change would affect enrollment levels, how to help students relocate if they realize a course is too difficult, and how to communicate with parents on the change. Mr. Woodcock believed that the change would not have a significant impact on class size, that out of the number of students who have made appeals (21 last year, 24 this year) all but one have been successful, and in terms of communicating with parents he believed that most of the concerns surrounding prerequisites comes from students/parents transitioning from 8th to 9th grade. In addition Mr. Woodcock stated that increased communication with parents via the Ottoson Middle School and the high school administration and guidance departments would be a priority.

On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Ms. Goodman it was unanimously Voted to insert the philosophy statement on prerequisite enrollment along with the required rubric in the AHS Program of Studies.

Mr. Schlichtman addressed the advanced level issue explaining that he is not in favor of eliminating the advanced track (or any track) without a process on how to achieve the goal of going from four to three tracks. Referencing the NEASC report that states AHS currently has too many levels, Mr. Schlichtman is not in favor of eliminating an upper level, but feels that we should be working towards eliminating the lowest level and raising course rigors while encouraging students to move up.

Mr. Schlichtman made the motion to restore the advanced level sections of English and social studies in the AHS Program of Studies. Seconded by Mr. Thrope

The Committee recessed to attend the public education forum from 6:55 pm to 9:00 pm.

Upon returning the Committee discussed at considerable length the handout by Mr. Woodcock highlighting advantages and disadvantages of reinstating approximately 3 additional teachers. The options considered were:

1. Reinstating selected upperclass elective course options i.e. IBS, Journalism, Art.
Advantages include: providing a full schedule of academic classes, reinstatement of courses reinforces comprehensive nature of high school program and less directed studies. Disadvantages include: does not decrease class size, difficulty in determining maximum class enrollment given complexity of scheduling and minimizing course conflicts.
2. Adding additional sections to English and History by continuing the Advanced level.
Advantages include: allows more time to plan for the transition to a program with 1 less level, eases the implementation of new course level enrollment philosophy and may reduce class size in honors.
Disadvantages: Delays the development of 3 strong clearly delineated levels consistently across department in the AHS Program of Studies, with limited sections of advanced courses, maximum enrollments cannot be guaranteed. Net effect will be the inability to service the number of students anticipated.

When asked for a recommendation Supt. Donovan supported both avenues stating that she believed that we could include both the advanced level and the addition of a few electives in the program of studies. Mrs. Donovan explained that after looking at the House budget, and based on the realignment of the O'Neill Formula, APS might be receiving an additional few hundred thousand dollars that would allow both options and recommended such.

On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Mr. Thrope it was unanimously Voted to adopt the AHS Program of Studies with the inclusion of the advanced level in English and Social Studies as well as the addition of sufficient electives to service the upper class students and reduce directed studies.

The Committee congratulated Mr. Woodcock on the full accreditation of Arlington High School.

Secretary's Report –

.. Correspondence – Ms. LaMachia reviewed correspondence.

.. Approval of Minutes:

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia and seconded Mr. Thrope it was

Voted to approve the regular meeting minutes of March 11, 2003. 5-2 (Ms. Sheffler & Mr. Thielman abstain).

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia and Mr. Thrope it was

Voted to approve the regular meeting minutes of March 25, 2003. 5-2 (Ms. Sheffler & Mr. Thielman abstain)

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia and seconded by Mr. Schlichtman it was

Voted to approve the executive session minutes of March 11, 2003. 5-2 (Ms. Sheffler & Mr. Thielman abstain)

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia and seconded by Mr. Schlichtman it was

Voted to approve the executive session minutes of March 25, 2003 5-2 (Ms. Sheffler & Mr. Thielman abstain).

Subcommittee Assignment

Ms. Owayda passed out subcommittee assignments.

Mr. Schlichtman commended the work of the AHS administration and department chairs on their work relative to the curriculum instruction and assessment subcommittee.

On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Ms. LaMachia it was unanimously

Voted to ADJOURN @ 10:00pm